



www.mysteriesandmargaritasblogspot.com

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Tuesdays Tidbits with Kari: Featuring author Lynda Fitzgerald!

Please help me welcome author Lynda Fitzgerald!

Kari: Your new mystery series, *LIVE*, sounds fascinating. Can you tell us a little about book one *RINGER*?

Lynda: I'd love to. *LIVE Ringer* opens when Allie Grainger inherits her aunt's small beach house and moves back to Florida. At that point in her life, Allie's a basket case. She only wants time to mourn her favorite aunt's death and recover from a nasty divorce. Then, within twenty-four hours, she stumbles--literally--on the body of a woman floating in the water at the Cape Canaveral jetty.

In the opening chapters, four men enter Allie's life. Joe Odum is one of her childhood friends, all grown up and turned sheriff's deputy. Cord Arbutten, the county sheriff, is another, and he makes it plain that he doesn't want Allie back in town. She can't understand it since her aunt worked for the sheriff most of her adult life and thought the world of him. The third is the editor of the local paper, who hints he was her aunt's lover. The last is a stranger who shows up on the beach the day the body is found. Allie is attracted to him until she learns that he was suspected of killing his wife a few years back. Her friend Joe doesn't trust him, but Allie isn't sure whether it's because he thinks the stranger is the killer or for more personal reasons.

Before long, the Sheriff's Department links the murder with a string of others down the coast of Florida, and some pretty unnerving similarities begin to emerge--all of the victims were about the same age, they were blonde, they were divorced, and they all looked a lot like Allie. As the weeks pass, Allie is pretty sure one of these men is the killer, and she begins to fear she might be his next victim.

Kari: How did you come up with such a great character as Allie Grainger?

Lynda: Characters tend to be composites, and Allie is no different. She and her best friend, Sheryl, also a sheriff's deputy like Joe, are bits of pieces of people I've known over the years. Allie was difficult for me because in the beginning, she's uncertain and a little withdrawn, the polar opposite of Sheryl, who is gutsy and forceful and determined to protect Allie from herself. All authors have favorite characters in each book, and I have to confess that at the beginning of *LIVE Ringer*, Sheryl is mine. Her brashness and humor appeal to me. About halfway through *LIVE Ringer*, Allie began to grow a spine and won me over. During the entire series, Allie is becoming more herself. Sheryl is changing, too. At the same time Allie is becoming more assertive, Sheryl is mellowing. That's why this turned into a series.

I had no intention of writing a second book when I began LIVE Ringer, but at the end of it, I just wasn't done with these characters. I had so much more I wanted them to experience, which led me to write LIVE Ammo, the second in the series. Then the third... Well, you know how it goes. I'm one of those authors who believe characters create themselves as the story progresses. That happened with my first book, IF TRUTH BE TOLD. My heroine, Christie O'Kelly, wrested the story from me on page one and took the novel in an entirely different direction than I'd intended. I love her, but she was a problem child. I had a heck of a time getting the story back where I wanted it. I do detailed biographies on each character before I begin, now. They still change and grow as the novel progresses, but it's less of a battle to have some say in the story line's progression.

Kari: You went from writing romantic suspense to mystery. What do you see as the biggest difference between the two similar genres?

Lynda: Actually, I don't see much difference--the publishers do. Well, that's not quite true. The "Romantic" in Romantic Suspense says that the book focuses strongly on the romantic element, and "suspense" doesn't necessarily need a murder, just lots of tension and the threat of one. Mystery, well, someone once said that a book wasn't a true mystery unless there was a dead body in the first chapter, which I thought was a bit rigid, but who am I to say? We tell the publishers what genre we consider our novels, and they tell us what they're marketing them as.

At first, they were insistent that my first book, IF TRUTH BE TOLD, was a romance, but a lot of fancy talking got them to re-categorize it as Romantic Suspense, a relief since the genesis of the book was the suspense aspect. My second, OF WORDS & MUSIC, they got right the first time. It's women's fiction, what used to be called mainstream. I was proud of them. LIVE Ringer is truly a mystery, complete with a dead body in chapter one (I said it was rigid, not that I wouldn't comply), an evil villain -- a few, in fact -- and a sexy hero. It's humorous, because I love humor and love reading humor. I couldn't possibly enjoy writing something I didn't enjoy reading.

I don't have a release date on the second in the series (LIVE Ammo) yet, but it's written and ready to go; and I'm expecting the series to go at least five books. Even more if I have more things I want to do to the characters. Right now, I'm working on another stand-alone mystery that takes place in Minneapolis. I haven't lived there since I was a small child, so I'll be doing a lot of research and will probably make a trip or two. But not in winter. By the way, if anyone's interested, I have information about all my books, including excerpts and film clips, on my website.

Kari: I love hearing about how and where people write since so many of us find it difficult to juggle our daily lives and still find time to write. What is your writing schedule like?

Lynda: Writing has been the hub of my life for over thirty years. I honestly can't imagine not writing, and it doesn't matter where I am, I write. I don't have a strict writing schedule like so many authors. I'll go three weeks with barely a break for meals, like I did recently, and then I'll write a couple of hours a day for a week or so. When I'm excited about a project--and why would I write anything I'm not excited about?--I can't stop the flow of words. Then it's almost as if I'm drained and the words have to build back up in me until I erupt again, sort of like Mount St. Helens. At that point, nothing could stop me writing. Bombs could be exploding around me. My German Shepherds could be eating the sofa (which has happened, by the way) and I wouldn't know a thing, even if I was in the same room.

I've heard so many people tell me, "I'd love to write a book if only I had time." The first many years of my adult writing life, I worked full time and raised two children and a husband, kept house, took care of all the finances (I told you I raised my husband. Sigh...), and I still found time to write. Sometimes at lunch at work. At night after the kids were in bed. On weekends when I could snatch a full hour or two. I wrote my first four novels under those conditions.

My point is that if you really want to write, you'll re-prioritize your life and write. If you're a writer, you won't be able to help it. That said; the thing I find most conducive to writing is isolation. Not necessary, but conducive. Writers HAVE to communicate. If there's no one around, we do it on paper. A suggestion - don't talk too much to others about a work in process. It tends to defuse the tension in you and lessen the need to write it down. Or at least, that's been my experience.

Kari: I also love discovering new authors to read. Who are your favorite authors?

Lynda: Like most authors, I have too many favorites to name. We could begin with Jane Austen, Mark Twain, Leon Uris, Sue Grafton--as I said, the list goes on. I've just discovered two new authors: Garth Stein, who wrote THE ART OF RACING IN THE RAIN, and Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows, authors of THE GURENESY LITERARY

AND POTATO PEEL SOCIETY; and I have to confess I hesitated to read either despite recommendations from people I respect. One reason is that it's hard to read when you're actively writing; but since I write all the time, I wouldn't get to read at all if I didn't. Unthinkable. Another is that I was afraid THE ART OF RACING IN THE RAIN would be silly. I mean, the main character is a Golden Retriever. I couldn't have been more wrong. Garth Stein handled it brilliantly. Enzo is wise and endearing, and his and his family's story touched me more deeply than I anticipated. THE GUERNSEY LITERARY AND POTATO PEEL SOCIETY sounded like a cozy, and I'm not a huge fan of cozy mystery. Again, wrong. It's the story of the German occupation of Guernsey Island (a British possession) during the WWII, but it's told second and third-hand through a series of letters that bring alive the island residents during four years of German rule and the author who came to love them. It's told with beauty, charm, and humor. If anything, it was reminiscent of Jane Austen, my single favorite author of all time. I think most readers would love both books. I certainly did.

Kari: Any final tips or pieces of advice for our readers and aspiring writers?

Lynda: Sure. Lots, but I'll hit on my top few. For the aspiring authors: Words - words are the only tool the writer has, and it's our job to make the words invisible. We want our readers so deeply involved in our plots and characters that they forget they're reading. Instead, they're seeing a movie in their mind. It's great to know a lot of words, but if a word, impressive as it may be, stops a reader, it pulls them out of the story. At that point, it's hard to get them back, and even if you do, it's not the same.

Also, spend time developing your characters. I'm talking in-depth development. Visualize them walking, talking to friends, crying (what would make them cry?). If you can't see and know them in your mind, neither will your readers. Imagine life on an unpopulated island. Sure, it would still be life, but it's the people around you who make life full and rich. You can have the best plot in the world, but if your characters are one or two dimensional, your work is lacking.

For readers: Don't limit yourself to one genre. I used to, but not anymore. For instance, I never read a book about World War I until I read Anne Perry's WWI series. The books were brilliant. She's a master of description, and I found myself in France, living through her characters: seeing what they saw, smelling the odors and feeling the battlefield mud oozing between my toes. You'll never know what all you like unless you experiment.

One other thing: don't bother to finish a book that doesn't grab you in the first fifty or so pages. If the author can't engage you in that space of time, they haven't done their job and it's unlikely the book will get better. I've really enjoyed talking to you. I could talk about writing and stories and characters all day.

Thank you for having me.

Lynda Fitzgerald <http://www.fitzgeraldwrites.com>

Posted by Kari Lee Townsend